

imprints

The Newsletter of Literacy BC

Celebrating Research in Practice

Sandy Middleton, Literacy BC

Research has traditionally been perceived as the domain of university-trained researchers. In the past, practitioners might be invited to give feedback or make comments about the research, but generally their role was limited to that of research subjects or informants. Today, that situation is changing. A different type of research – research in practice – is on the rise in the Canadian adult literacy field.

Research in practice takes place on the ground, in the field. It opens up opportunities in classrooms, learning centres, and other community locations for practitioners and learners to ask and find answers to their questions about teaching and learning.

Research in practice requires resources, training, time and space. In British Columbia practitioners can take advantage of several initiatives which support their participation in research in practice. The National Literacy Secretariat and the Ministry of Advanced Education, through the BC Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Program, fund “research friends” who

offer one-to-one assistance to practitioners in developing and undertaking research projects and connecting with research literature. As part of this project, semi-annual group training workshops provide practitioners with training in research methodologies and the opportunity to reflect and

share experiences with peers. As a result, we have a rich diversity of research in practice projects taking place in the BC literacy field, and an emerging provincial research in practice network – RiPAL-BC (Research in Practice in Adult Literacy-BC). (page 6).

In this special edition newsletter we celebrate these and other achievements. Pierre Walter of the University of British Columbia sets the stage by reminding us that research in practice shifts the ways in which knowledge is valued and created and democratizes relationships between the literacy community and the university. In the following pages we hear the voices of both practitioners and university-trained researchers who share the work they are doing to create new knowledge and bridge old divides.

On page 7, Marina Niks, a research friend for the BC adult literacy field since 1999, reflects on how her role has changed during the past four years. Over several pages, BC practitioners write about their research in practice projects: a collaborative project among veteran practitioners who are examining what makes them effective in the classroom; a participatory action research project among sex trade workers in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside; and a participatory action research project in which dual meanings of the word “agency” connect the research of two groups of students in two communities in northwest BC.

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...literacy.ca, Fall 2003

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Celebrating Research in Practice (Cont'd)...

On page 20 Heide Wrigley introduces us to the concept of "Real World Research." Heide is the senior researcher at the New School @ Surrey, a national youth literacy demonstration project. Heide shares with us some of her experiences and choices as a researcher and describes the collaborative research and development model at The New School.

Across Canada momentum is growing for research in practice. An inter-provincial web site is in development (www.nald.ca/ripal/). Events have been held for the past three years – in Edmonton, Vancouver, and St. John's – to explore issues and support the growing number of practitioners interested in engaging in research. Eleven BC practitioners attended the 2003 Research in Practice Institute in St. John's, Newfoundland, last June. Several of them share their experiences of the Institute with us and you will find their reflections woven throughout this newsletter.

In spring 2003, the first issue of a Canadian research journal, *Literacies: Researching practice, practising research*, was published. As described on page 19, the intent of the journal is to nourish the links between theoretical work and literacy practice. Literacy BC is pleased to partner with the journal by including a complimentary copy of *Literacies*.

Throughout the newsletter you will also find information about research resources, funding, projects, online discussions – and more.

In our final pages, we honour someone who has been an important part of the literacy field for almost 30 years and key to the development of research in practice in BC. Audrey Thomas retired as Education Officer with the Ministry of Advanced Education in June 2003. It is our great pleasure to mark Audrey's retirement by reflecting on her career and contributions as a researcher and an advocate for research in practice.

A View from the Ivory Tower



I have always believed that university research should serve the community.

Coming out of a land grant college, I was taught that research should be informed by the educational needs of the greater public community, and that it should have some practical application in improving people's lives.¹ Under the "Wisconsin Idea" of extension education popularized in the early 1900s, university research on everything from new soil conservation techniques and sustainable forest management to advances in civil engineering, medical science and education would be extended out to the public, informed at its root by people's needs.

My present employer, the University of British Columbia, ran a thriving Department of Extension Education from 1936 to 1979, following this "Wisconsin Idea." As former UBC adult educator Gordon Selman (1975) tells the story, for almost four decades the UBC Department of Extension Education offered community-oriented, non-credit, nonformal education courses for adults across the province.

Theatre, music, creative writing, group study correspondence courses, a program in co-operative production and marketing for fishermen, the BC Farm Radio Forum, parenting and home economics education, youth leadership training, and film circuits traveling to local communities were all programs offered by the Department to greater BC. With a

focus on developing both effective and imaginative programs for adults, research and experimentation on educational practice was central to the Department's work. New methods and techniques of adult education at the time – radio, films, study groups, discussion techniques and field work – were constantly tested, debated and eventually adopted in extension programs across British Columbia and beyond.

In many ways this was adult education research at its best: it was wonderfully community-oriented, humanistic, wide-ranging, and dedicated to improving educational programs and extending them out to adults at the margins of society.

In more contemporary extension education (what I am familiar with is mostly in rural development), there is now a more radical call for a complete reversal of the ways in which knowledge is valued and created, and as a consequence the ways in which research is done. Research in practice, in particular, is now seen not as "us" (god-like) academics researching "them" (less than god-like) practitioners, and then extending the knowledge "created" by "us" back to "them". Instead, it is academic and local experts ("indigenous knowledge specialists" as the extension lingo goes) coming together to negotiate research agendas, practices and outcomes which might be useful for both.

Here, the role of outside researchers is more to bring local experts – in our case, literacy practitioners, learners

and community members – together to learn from each other, to organize forums of exchange and support, and to promote "lateral" research

Research in practice, in particular, is now seen not as "us" (god-like) academics researching "them" (less than god-like) practitioners, and then extending the knowledge "created" by "us" back to "them". Instead, it is academic and local experts ("indigenous knowledge specialists" as the extension lingo goes) coming together to negotiate research agendas, practices and outcomes which might be useful for both.

collaborations (across both geography and experience), rather than top-down transfers of knowledge, research and learning. Part of this is to learn from each other what works and what doesn't, what approaches to improving practice are most useful in what circumstances and so on, but part of this is also about developing a common language of how to look at educational practice, and how to learn more about it, to understand and improve it.

Outsider academics are expected to be experts in the practices of research, and might have experience organizing and facilitating research but do not pretend to have expert knowledge of local communities, literacy practitioners, their research priorities, or their desires for change and improvements in educational practice. In other words, academics,

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(Footnote)

¹Land grant colleges were universities which were given federal land in exchange for serving the public community through applied research and extension education in agriculture, engineering and home economics.

A View from the Ivory Tower (Cont'd)

Reversals of learning, status, and control in research do occur, nudged on by academics and university outsiders with a sense of social responsibility or social justice. Cracks appear in the institutional foundation, a bit of dirt blows in, small plants take root, flowers bloom and are quietly watered.

as supporters of research in practice, do not try to control the direction, shape or outcomes of research (as is all too often the case), but act as informed resource persons for practitioners interested in researching their own educational practice.

What prevents more of this sort of non-traditional research from going on? As Robert Chambers (1983) tells us the mainstream professional culture of academics, their values and preferences in research, and the sorts of people they are most comfortable working with all work against a more equal relationship between researchers and practitioners (see box next page).

The current political economy of the "corporate" university only reinforces these values: as university researchers, we are under pressure to publish our research in the most scholarly (as opposed to practice-oriented) journals, we are encouraged to publish frequently (seen as an indicator of "performance") and we are expected to conduct

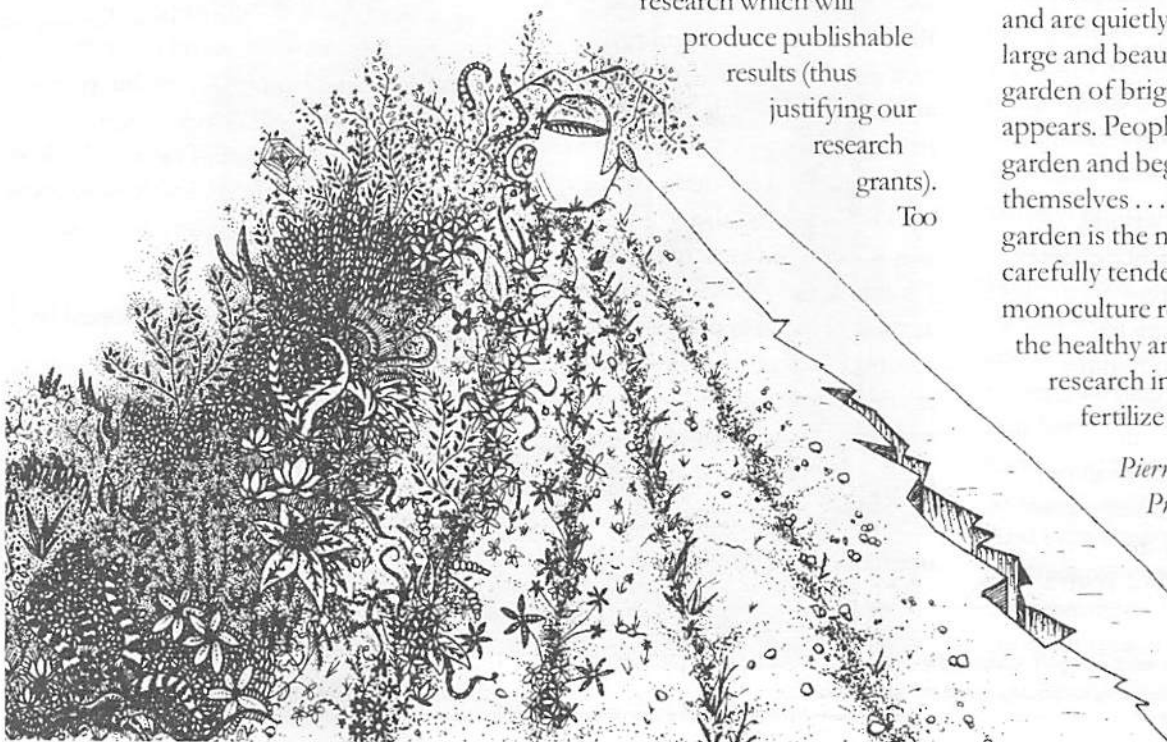
research which will produce publishable results (thus justifying our research grants). Too

much about research in practice is long-term, untidy, small scale, irregular, unpredictable, with no easily quantifiable outcomes, and doesn't lend itself to these types of publications – in fact it often works against them. By democratizing research, research in practice also challenges our professional norms, identity and position of privilege as the creators (through research) and distributors (through publications) of new knowledge. So it is not too surprising that research in practice is not widely embraced by academic researchers.

On the other hand, there are always new spaces opening up for change in academic culture and research, even in our increasingly corporate-like settings. Reversals of learning, status, and control in research do occur, nudged on by academics and university outsiders with a sense of social responsibility or social justice. Cracks appear in the institutional foundation, a bit of dirt blows in, small plants take root, flowers bloom and are quietly watered. They grow large and beautiful and soon a whole garden of brightly coloured flowers appears. People stop to admire the garden and begin planting flowers themselves . . . Eventually, the wild garden is the norm, and between the carefully tended rows of straight monoculture research begin to sprout the healthy and beautiful roots of research in practice. Our job is to fertilize these roots.

Pierre Walter is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia.

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Reflections from Newfoundland

Diana Twiss

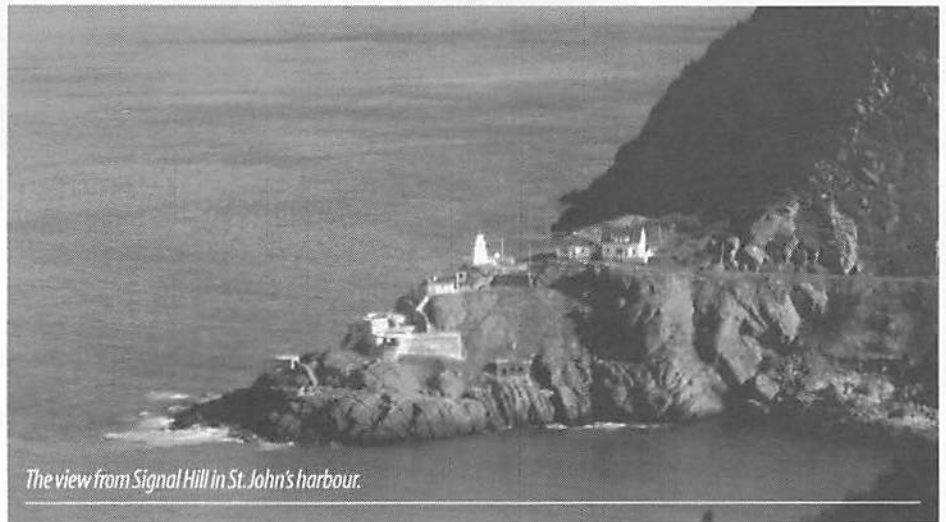
Apart from the amazing scenery and the warmth of our hosts, what has stayed with me about the Research in Practice Institute in St. John's is the excellent way the conference was organized and the sense of community I felt.

The mornings were spent in pre-selected sessions where we could learn in depth about a topic of our choosing. I selected Jenny Horsman's "Feminist Approaches to Research in Practice." Other choices were Marina Niks' "Getting Started on Research in Practice," Joe Norris' "Arts Based Research" and "Researching Literacy Practices" with Mary Hamilton. Over four days we worked with the same group of people, grappled with issues and ideas and, as a result, felt like a community of learners. In the afternoons we attended different inquiry groups or workshops.

A conference newsletter - "Midnight Express" - kept us all up-to-date on some of the emerging issues and offered playful commentary about the conference.

It was a fantastic gathering. I look forward to more meetings with this group of movers and shakers.

Diana Twiss is an instructor in the Community Development & Outreach Program of Capilano College.



The view from Signal Hill in St. John's harbour.



A View from the Ivory Tower (cont'd)

Mainstream Academic Preferences

For Technology, Research and Projects

Urban	vs.	Rural
Industrial		Agricultural
High cost		Low cost
Capital-using		Labour-using
Complex		Simple
Large		Small
Modern		Traditional
Quantified		Unquantified
Geometrical		Irregular
Visible and seen		Invisible or unseen
Tidy		Untidy
Predictable		Unpredictable

For Contacts and Clients

High Status	vs.	Low status
Rich		Poor
Influential		Powerless
Educated		Less educated
Male		Female
Light-skinned		Dark-skinned

Source: adopted from Chambers, 1983, p. 173



References:

Chambers, Robert (1983). *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. Essex, England: Longman.

Selman, Gordon (1975). *A Decade of Transition: The Extension Department of the University of British Columbia 1960 to 1970*. Vancouver: UBC Centre for Continuing Education.



Research in Practice in Adult Literacy

A provincial network is building on the growing enthusiasm for research in practice.

In 2002 a small group of people from different backgrounds and locations came together to support and encourage research in practice in BC. We:

- Value knowledge generated through practice reflective work.
- Believe practitioners should be supported and encouraged to participate in research and have access to the resources, space and time needed to make research a part of their working lives.

We offer:

- Assistance in starting a research project.
- Training in doing research.
- Information about funding and resources.
- Connections to individuals and groups engaged in research in practice.
- Information about research in practice in BC and across the country.

Contact us at RIPAL-BC@TheHub.literacy.bc.ca to find out more.

Research in practice seeks to inform and improve daily practice. Literacy practitioners engage in research in a range of ways: conducting research, reading and responding to research, reflecting on practice in light of research, and applying research findings to practice. These activities take place in different locations by practitioner researchers who have a variety of formal and informal training about research.

Reference:

Horsman, Jenny and Mary Norton (1999). *A Framework to Encourage and Support Practitioner Involvement in Adult Literacy Research in Practice in Canada*. <www.nald.ca/ripal/Resources/Framwrk/cover.htm>



Research Friend: An Amazing Journey



I am a “research friend” for the BC adult literacy field. I facilitate research

workshops, encourage and support practitioners in doing research, and engage in one-to-one and group discussions online and in person. I have also been part of several research projects with practitioners and learners. It is an amazing journey!

When I think back to the first workshop I facilitated with Colleen Reid (a UBC colleague) in 1999, I find it hard to believe how the workshops – and I as a researcher and educator – have changed. When I started this work four years ago I saw myself transferring to the field what I learned in university about how to do research. But I was pushed and questioned, and encouraged to explore different ways of understanding my role and practitioners’ roles in defining research. Today I see myself facilitating the emergence of new ways of doing research by practitioners, questioning assumptions about how research “should” be done and by whom.

One of the most exciting aspects of my work as research friend is that I am not alone. From the beginning, Audrey Thomas of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Diane Morrison of the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology have been a constant source of support and encouragement. And others have become interested and willing to work together as research friends. Believing that we could challenge traditional ways of

Marina Niks

generating knowledge about literacy, a small group started meeting in 2002 to build what is now RiPAL-BC, a network to support research in practice in BC (page 6).

One nagging challenge in my work is the fact that practitioners who are eager to engage in research activities cannot or will not write a research proposal for an individual project. Deadlines to apply for funding come and go. Practitioners say their “proposal-writing” energy is directed to program delivery proposals. Their

Today I see myself facilitating the emergence of new ways of doing research by practitioners, questioning assumptions about how research “should” be done and by whom.

professional lives – let alone their personal lives – are too busy and stressful. Writing a research proposal is not a priority. But practitioners *are* interested in being part of larger projects that support their own particular interests and offer them the opportunity to work within a supportive environment. That is why I developed a project to support a small community of practitioner-researchers.

“Supporting Literacy Practitioner-Researcher Projects,” a new project beginning in fall 2003, is funded by the BC Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Program and sponsored by the Adult Basic Education Association of BC. It will encourage and help literacy and ABE practitioners carry out small, individual research projects

within their daily practice. Up to eight practitioner-researchers will choose the topic they want to research, collect data, analyse it and write about their findings. We will form support groups to facilitate each individual project while developing a research community. Online discussions, teleconferences and face-to-face meetings will facilitate interaction within the community. This project builds on previous research in practice projects carried out in Alberta by Mary Norton and Grace Malicky and on a framework for coordinated support to research in practice described by Jenny Horsman and Mary Norton (1999).

I am excited about this project. It gives practitioners the opportunity to ask the questions *they* are interested in finding answers to, the freedom to explore more questions, and the choice to decide how to access information and share findings with colleagues. I see it as one more step in the process of developing knowledge about the field by people in the field. I look forward to sharing their journey.

Marina Niks is a doctoral candidate at the University of British Columbia. Her role as research friend in the BC literacy field has been funded by the BC Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Program since 1999.

Reference:

Horsman, Jenny and Mary Norton (1999). *A Framework to Encourage and Support Practitioner Involvement in Adult Literacy Research in Practice in Canada*. <www.nald.ca/ripal/Resourses/Framwrk/cover.htm>

Searching for Research Resources

May Chan, Literacy BC Librarian

www2.literacy.bc.ca/catalogue/

In September 2003 the Provincial Literacy Resource Centre at Literacy BC went live on the web! A state of the art web-based catalogue now offers electronic access to BC's largest lending collection of literacy resources. The catalogue was developed by Literacy BC in partnership with the National Adult Literacy Database (NALD). The searchable catalogue contains more than 3650 items.

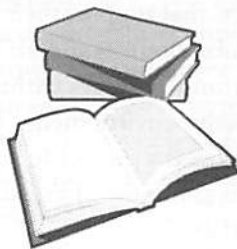
Our collection of research resources includes all the research products of BC cost-shared projects, national and international research reports, and materials on research methods. Search for a specific title or author or use subject terms such as:

Broad subject term: *Research*

Narrower subject terms: *Academic research*
Action research
Action research in education
Educational research
Evaluation research (Social action programs)
Evaluative research
Field research
Participatory research
Qualitative research

The online catalogue offers a variety of search functions, including **Quick Search**, **Basic Search** (on a Title, Author or Subject), and **Subject List**. Tips and guidelines to searching the catalogue are at www2.literacy.bc.ca/resources/access.htm.

Contact library@literacy.bc.ca for more information.



A Fond Farewell to May

In October May Chan moved to a new job at the Vancouver Public Library. In her work as the Literacy BC librarian May spearheaded the increasing sophistication of our library services. Among her many accomplishments was the design and implementation of our web-based catalogue. We will miss May's gentle presence and outstanding expertise. We wish her all the best in her new career as a public librarian.



Reflections from Newfoundland

Evelyn Battell

Newfoundland is magic for me. The land shapes the awareness, just like it does in most of BC. But there are big and small differences: the oh-so-different-rocks, the not so "pacific" ocean. The people, from taxi drivers to waitresses, tell us that life is better if it's funny. Also, here is an entire province that understands unemployment.

The Institute also had a Newfoundland "air" about it. Nothing fancy - minimal even. Lightly, proudly gracious. An easy mix of different "status" - practitioners, academics and all shades in-between. I felt confident in having my "practitioner" opinions and for the first time I did not value my "practitioner" side over my "research" side. I had some of the richest conversations about my practice that I've had in some years. Is research in practice the new place to find the real explorers in the adult literacy field? I learned many things about research, about feminist approaches, about new and old colleagues. I was lucky to be there.

Evelyn Battell is an ABE instructor at Malaspina University-College in Duncan, BC.

Research begins at the Canucks Family Education Centre

Jean Rasmussen



Research is beginning this fall at the Canucks Family Education Centre to examine the social, economic and educational impacts of a “comprehensive approach to family literacy” over a three year period.

The Canucks Family Education Centre is a partnership between Britannia Community Services Centre, Canucks for Kids Fund and Literacy BC. The Centre’s mandate is to positively impact low literacy levels on Vancouver’s east side by providing a provincial and national demonstration model of a coordinated, comprehensive, integrated services approach to family literacy and life-long learning.

The charitable arm of the Vancouver Canucks, the Canucks for Kids Fund, has provided \$150,000 over a three-year period to provide programming, resources and staff for the Centre.

For more information contact:

Jean Rasmussen, Director
Phone: 604 713-8273 or
604 773-8249
Email: JRasmussen@literacy.bc.ca



Reflections from Newfoundland

Tracy Defoe

For me, St. John’s was a treat, and a retreat too. I was there to celebrate the launch of the new journal *Literacies: researching practice, practising research*. Treat. I also went to share the implications for practice from the *In-Sites* research project that I have been working on for almost five years. Treat. The biggest treat though was the *Literacy Practices* course I took with Mary Hamilton of Lancaster, UK. Since 1998 I have been reading Mary’s and others’ work about literacies as social practice—the moments and ways literacy is woven into our lives. In our small and intimate group we had Elsa Auerbach, a noted researcher from the US, as our recorder. Sweet.

Like many there, my work is hard to fit in a box. I do literacy research but I am not a graduate student or a university-based academic. I teach but I am not employed by a college or a community group. I’m a practitioner by many definitions, although I don’t like that term. But in St. John’s, even though I think I was the only workplace educator there, I fit. I have attended all the other conferences in this series, and I hope we keep it up. Traveling to Newfoundland from Vancouver, and staying in the simplicity of the dorm was a time away from the activities of my regular life and a welcome retreat to think about why I was there, and what researching literacies means to me, and to others.

Case studies from Mary Hamilton’s course in St. John’s are posted on the web at www.brown.edu/lvri/hamilton.html.

Tracy Defoe is a workplace literacy educator and researcher in Vancouver.



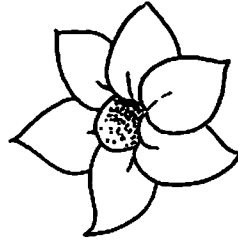
Bonnie Soroake

Oh it was such a treat
to be surrounded by people who speak the same language (of literacy, of research),
who are interested and interesting,
and so full of warmth and support.
In that atmosphere I thrive, I glow on the street like a neon raspberry.
I feel such surges of power
that come from and through this group,
this group that feeds ideas,
that renews energy,
that builds on a strength that ANYTHING is possible!
So yes, in a word, my experience of Newfoundland was quite *invigorating*.

Bonnie Soroake is a Master’s student at the University of British Columbia and an active participant in RiPAL-BC.

What Makes an Effective Instructor?

Evelyn Battell and Leora Gesser



We have grown up along with our discipline – embracing the challenges, inventing methodologies and loving our jobs and our students.

Twenty-five years ago Adult Basic Education (ABE) practitioners were young and so was the ABE field. Many of us had not heard of ABE or, if we had, we thought primarily of night-time classes in basement spaces. We fell into the field through happenstance with little understanding of the tremendous opportunities and growth that lay ahead. But we have grown up along with our discipline – embracing the challenges, inventing methodologies and loving our jobs and our students. So what are our qualities now that we are veterans? What makes us successful? A research project is underway to look at just that.

Five long-term instructors are looking at: What makes a literacy/ABE instructor effective in her/his practice? We have designed this project to describe, reflect, analyse and define our practice from a research perspective. We are interested in exploring the answers to certain questions:

- What makes us effective in the classroom?
- What happens between the learner and the instructor that makes us feel effective?
- What does effective mean in the ABE/literacy context?
- What happens when we feel ineffective?

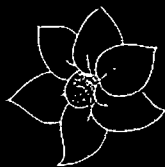
The research has taken us on a journey through our autobiographies, journaling our daily practice and interviewing colleagues. We are just beginning to grapple with the analysis and writing. We hope to report in the spring of 2004 and the following year.

What Makes an Effective Instructor is funded by the BC Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Program and the Vancouver Foundation. The project is sponsored by the Adult Basic Education Association of BC and Literacy BC.

Evelyn Battell is an ABE instructor at Malaspina University-College in Duncan, BC. Leora Gesser is an ABE instructor at Selkirk College in Grand Forks, BC. The other team members are Judy Rose and Diana Twiss of Capilano College in North Vancouver and Jan Sawyer of Okanagan University College in Salmon Arm.

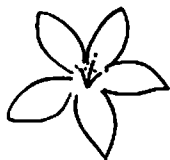
Literacy for Women on the Streets

Lucy Alderson and Diana Twiss



"In here, we aren't working girls or drug addicts, we are just learners. It's like as soon as you come through the doorway, we get along, people are nice to each other and we are just people."

Participant



Literacy for Women on the Streets was a participatory action research project

(August 2001 – June 2003) that examined the impact of literacy activities on the lives of women sex trade workers in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.

We found that sex trade workers are ready to learn. They are also ready to create, to teach and to organize their community. But clearly, learning institutions are not ready for sex trade workers.

Participatory action research was difficult to achieve for a variety of reasons; however, we worked in strong collaboration with the women at WISH (Women's Information and Safe House) and experienced numerous participatory instances. Many women at WISH inspired the research project and we all learned a great deal in our collective efforts to create literacy and learning opportunities in the WISH Drop In Centre.

During the research we came to understand the deep-rooted stereotypes society has attached to women working in the sex trade and the impact of these stereotypes on women's self-concept and learning. We generated a list of myths about

women's learning – myths that are lived by women at WISH, that shape their daily experiences and access to learning.

Myth 1: Women who work in the sex trade are just objects, they have no minds.

Women in the sex trade in the Downtown Eastside have active minds and important thoughts. The voices of women sex trade workers are voices our society needs to hear. The women of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside come from towns, reserves and cities across the country. Many women's lives were determined by their experiences in their home communities. We need to understand how poverty, discrimination, sexual abuse, learning disabilities and societal betrayal make drugs and street life a viable option for young women in this country. Women at WISH have poured out their experiences through writing, poetry, advocacy and art. Their eloquence demonstrates to us how important literacy and learning opportunities are to everyone and, in particular, to women who have access to so few resources.

Myth 2: Women who work in the sex trade and/or who use drugs are not "ready" to learn.

We found that sex trade workers *are* ready to learn. They are also ready to

create, to teach and to organize their community. But clearly, learning institutions are not ready for sex trade workers. Women described how important it is to have a space at WISH where they can be active in their learning while they are active in their addictions. Women articulated how important it is to be in a non-judgmental environment that matches their definition of safe. Until institutions and society change their views of sex trade workers, literacy programs belong where women already feel safe. This requires instructors and funders to accept the challenge of doing literacy work in new ways with new community partners.

Myth 3: Street-involved women are not interested in building their minds or in getting pleasure from thinking, reading, discussion or analysis.

Over the past two years, the WISH Learning Centre distributed hundreds of donated books, dozens of journals and reams of writing paper. Women published 15 newsletters and debated the politics of gender, the use of prescription methadone and the role of governments in maintaining or eliminating the social safety net. Women at WISH are thrilled to have access to the Internet,

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Literacy for Women on the Streets (Cont'd)

using it as an instant source of information on every subject ranging from Hepatitis C to Inuit legends. Being involved in street life and the

Being involved in street life and the sex trade can be a temporary experience for women or a lifetime occupation. Women at WISH tell us that it is important to nourish their desire for knowledge, discussion and debate and that we learn from the stories of their lives.

sex trade can be a temporary experience for women or a lifetime occupation. Women at WISH tell us that it is important to nourish their desire for knowledge, discussion and debate and that we learn from the stories of their lives.

Our research findings provide a picture of the way sex trade workers use the WISH Learning Centre to

empower and stabilize their lives. Women gravitate toward the Learning Centre when they need reflective time, when they need something besides the street. The constant presence of the Learning Centre and the welcoming environment ensure that learning is always there for women when they can make time and when they are ready. It is also important that the Learning Centre is a place women can return to, without judgment.

The research project provided everyone with a broader view of what makes learning safe for street-involved women. Without their candid feedback, we would not know how much kindness, respect, encouragement and a non-judgmental attitude mean to women who have no other place to learn.

The WISH Learning Centre opens both a physical and a mental space for women in the sex trade in the

Downtown Eastside. While other organizations have tried to provide food and health services to women, they have not fed their minds or their spirits. The Learning Centre provides a space for women to exhale, to experiment with their learning and to use literacy as a process for healing, self-reflection and harm reduction. By following and supporting the agenda women set for themselves at WISH, the Learning Centre is able to reinforce women's forays into leadership and collective empowerment.

Funded by the BC Adult Literacy Cost-Shared program and sponsored by Capilano College and WISH.

Lucy Alderson and Diana Twiss are instructors in the Community Development and Outreach Department of Capilano College.

Copies of the report are available from Literacy BC.



Reflections from Newfoundland

Mary Kiviste

I am new to working in the adult literacy field – this is the beginning of my second year – and I am very motivated to learn more. I think about literacy far too much. I have to be careful or it will distort the balance that I have fiercely protected in my life until now. The insights that I gained at the Institute came from intense listening and reflection. It was emotional and tiring but very rewarding. I wanted to learn about

research but I also wanted to be among literacy people to see what they could teach me. Here are some of my learnings.

The Arts Based Research course with Joe Norris played with my idea of finding answers. It kind of turned me upside down and all of a sudden I had a perspective that produced some answers (and questions). I loved it.

In talking with a long-time literacy instructor about the difficulties of running a one-to-one tutoring program, I learned that I only need to plant the seed. If learners drop out, they will pick it up again somewhere, sometime. With forward movement there is always some sliding back.

I learned about helping community organizations improve their services by reducing literacy barriers. In her workshop, Audrey Gardener (of Bow Valley College in Calgary) told us, "If it's not in your bones, it's in your way." I hope to use this because I believe it can really help to create a community that understands – perceptions can be changed.

I am trying to develop a big picture to help create positive change in this big issue. One of the big things I learned was that I must read the research. Marina also advised me to keep a literacy journal. This I can do. This will be my research for now.

Mary Kiviste is a Literacy Coordinator at Okanagan University College in Penticton.



Reflections from Newfoundland

Suzanne Smythe

The beautiful and historical setting, the friendly people, and the thoughtful organization of the Institute in St. John's provided the backdrop for some compelling questions: What counts as research, and who decides? How is research conducted in the context of our everyday work as adult literacy educators different from academic research? How can we build support and credibility for research in practice? How does research in practice contribute to our understanding of literacy issues among adults and families in diverse settings across Canada?

We did not come up with definitive answers in St. John's. But, four months later, as I revisit my diary and sort through my recollections of the many ways in which we grappled with these questions, I am struck by how my personal reflections and

perspectives intersect with broader themes of adult and family literacy work. Indeed, for me, the power of recognizing and embracing the personal experiences of literacy educators and learners lies at the heart of research in practice in adult literacy.

In St. John's we discussed the power of statistical research in shaping literacy policy and practice in Canada. But some participants pointed out that when 'objective outsiders' formulate questions and design research to do *to* learners and teachers, rather than *with* learners and teachers, the complex relationships between literacy and everyday life, particularly in family settings, can be misunderstood or misrepresented. Research in practice is driven by issues that practitioners or learners identify on the ground. It offers fresh ideas and perspectives on conventional

Indeed, for me, the power of recognizing and embracing the personal experiences of literacy educators and learners lies at the heart of research in practice in adult literacy.

beliefs about literacy in family settings.

Research in practice can provide insights into important issues in family literacy work and fill gaps in family literacy research. In my own work as a family literacy practitioner, I ask questions such as: How do parents, especially mothers, experience the expectation that they are their child's first educator? What literacies are valued and practiced in home and community settings? How can schools be more open to this diversity? How are women who do not want to participate in family literacy programs limited in their choice of other educational opportunities?

My participation in the Institute led me to believe that practitioner researchers need to pay close attention to the similarities and differences between official discourses of literacy and what we experience in literacy settings. Research in practice can then contribute to deeper understandings of literacy issues, and open up opportunities for public discussion of the complexities and possibilities of literacy work.

Suzanne Smythe is a family literacy practitioner and a doctoral candidate at the University of British Columbia. Suzanne is an active participant in RiPAL-BC.



A house by the Atlantic Ocean in Tors Cove, Newfoundland, a half hour drive from St. John's.

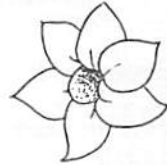
Access & Agency

Anne Docherty and Dee McRae

Agency – a.gen.cy

1. *The condition of being in action; operation.*
2. *A business or service authorized to act for others: an employment agency.*

Adapted from: The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company



Two groups of students in Houston and Hazelton in northwest BC began Phase One of a participatory action research project last year by mapping the support and services in their communities for adults and younger adults returning to school.

The students wanted to find out what an adult needs before he/she is able to attend school and the services available to meet those needs.

The research team in Houston developed a list of needs (see box on next page) and invited representatives from social service agencies in the community to come and talk to the project team about the services they offer. The team interviewed the representatives and taped and transcribed the interviews. The students found there are more services in Houston than they had realized.

Agency representatives found the interview process provided them with a new outlook on their services and helped them to identify gaps in their service.

Early in the research, the students realized that not everyone gets the same service when they go to an agency. It became apparent that individual “agency” (the condition of being in action; operation) often determines how well you are treated when you go to an “agency” (a business or service authorized to act for others).

Indeed, personal “agency” can determine whether you ever get out your own door to arrive at the door of a service “agency.” The students found that some people do not know that they can use the services of agencies in their community, do not understand how to get service, and are not comfortable using the service. They also found that some people – for example, those who are deaf, blind, or have English as a second language – may not receive the same service as others.

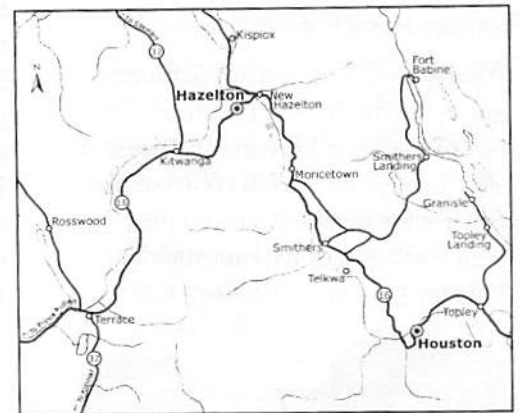
The research team of young adults in Hazelton became interested in agency as personal and political power. Building on research that looks at learning as a tool to foster social change, the students articulated elements of personal power and how this type of agency provides an individual with the aptitude, confidence and

...continued on next page

Playing with the meanings and mappings of agency in the concrete and the abstract, the students learned what it takes for adults to become students, to make changes in their lives.



Cyra Frisk, a member of the Hazelton research team, synthesized the research findings to create this poster. Full-colour posters are available for \$10 from The Learning Shop, Box 34, Hazelton, BC. V0J 1Y0. Phone: 250-842-6500 Fax: 250-842-6502 Email: adocherty@upperskeena.ca



One word, defined two ways, connects two research teams in two communities 130 kilometres apart

Some of the Identified Needs of Adult Students

Childcare
Clothing
Comfort
Community
Culture
Desire
Dignity
Dreams
Drive
Drug free
Ease of mind
Encouragement
Exercise
Family
Food
Healthy mind
Hope
Know where to go
Money
Motivation
Need
Nourishment
Patience
Personal control
Purpose
Reason
Recreation
Respect
Security

Brainstorming a list of needs was pretty straightforward, but trying to place them according to a hierarchy became much more difficult. One of the first discoveries the students made was that they each had their own individual hierarchy of needs.

Access & Agency (Cont'd)

motivation to engage in traditional literacy skills as well as bring about personal and community change.

Playing with the meanings and mappings of agency in the concrete and the abstract, the students learned what it takes for adults to become students, to make changes in their lives. They also learned huge things about community, adults, school, learning, maps, research and the two meanings of agency.

Learning and Research from the Participant Point of View

I am a wife, mother, friend, sister and the list goes on. Five years ago I walked into Northwest Community College in the pursuit of an education. I never suspected how profoundly an education would impact myself, my family and my friends. I have concluded that it was far easier to walk through life with little education. Issues that were once black and white are now various shades of grey. The shades of grey represent different perspectives, opportunities and challenges.

Although I am a university undergraduate I have remained a constant presence at NWCC. It is there that I met people who share my love/hate relationship with literacy. There that I gained a sense of empowerment in regards to my literacy abilities. There that I can use the knowledge that I have gained to advocate for those that struggle with literacy issues. So my involvement with this participatory action research is a way of examining the grey areas.

Belinda Lacombe
Houston Project Team Phase 1 & 2

The project has received Phase 2 funding from the BC Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Program, beginning fall 2003. The project teams will build on Phase 1 by planning, designing and implementing an intervention to increase access to agency/agencies.

Anne Docherty is the administrator for the Storytellers' Foundation Learning Shop in Hazelton, a storefront education centre that promotes informal learning and social development. Dee McRae is an instructor at Northwest Community College in Houston and the Regional Literacy Coordinator for northwest BC.

Project sponsors: Houston Link to Learning; The Learning Shop, Hazelton; Northwest Community College

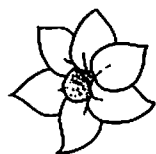


Chasing the Beast

Dee McRae

Dancing in the

Dark: How do Adults with Little Formal Education Learn? How do Literacy Practitioners do Collaborative Research? By Marina Niks, Darcy Allen, Paula Davies, Dee McRae and Kate Nonesuch, 2003. *The Dancing in the Dark* research team is moderating an electronic conference about their report **November 15 to December 14, 2003** on The Hub, the BC literacy electronic network.



The *Dancing in the Dark* project was our first attempt at this type of

endeavour, so we are to be forgiven. How were we to know what we were getting into? We wanted to learn more about research. We wanted to work together. One thing led to another. Gradually the project took on the feel of a first, but collaborative, pregnancy – an obsession, demanding more and more of our time, emotions, and DNA.

At the end of our extended pregnancy, we collaboratively and painfully birthed the babe. The final research report is the test if you like, the item the rest of the world (slight exaggeration) will use to evaluate both our project and us as researchers. Like any report and any baby, what you see in the report is like what you see of an extended family history

when you look only at a picture of the baby - only a fraction of the entire endeavour. There is simply no way a photograph can capture an entire child, no way a report can capture an entire project.

The report was published almost one year ago, and now seems to be making its way around the world, following ocean currents, being passed from person to person and pulsing its independent way through cyberspace. We, the writers, are now the collaborative mothers of the “beast” we gave birth to, the beast who now seems to have a life of its own. We face a dilemma: do we feed it and encourage this beast to grow, or do we smother it now before it takes control of our collective lives?

We decided, not without hesitation, that the electronic conference on The Hub is an amazing opportunity for our darling creation to go forth into the world. It will allow us to delve more deeply into the

project, and to get below the surface of the report. We are both excited and scared. Is our babe ready for this? Are we ready? We know our report is like any demanding first born, far from perfect, so how will others react? Will they see beauty or beast? Where will this step take the research and the researchers? As collaborative mothers, we have learned from our creation and we appreciate there is only one strategy we can use to find these answers. We must *just do it*.

So forgive us as we charge blindly after our “little precious.” We have no idea where we are going or when we will arrive. We hope you will join us for our online discussion about learning, researching and literacy. Who knows where else the darling will take us? We plan to have fun in the process, make new connections and dream new dreams. And isn't that what learning is all about?



Join the *Dancing in the Dark* electronic conference on The Hub, November 15 to December 14, 2003.

To register, contact Sandy Middleton
at Literacy BC:

Phone: 604-684-0624

1-800-663-1293 toll-free in BC

Email: SMiddleton@literacy.bc.ca



Reflections from Newfoundland

Karen Burns

When I returned to my college after the Institute and people asked me "How was it?" I replied with a fervour usually reserved for an acolyte first seeing the light - the Institute changed my life! It changed the way I view my practice, and it changed my outlook on the responsibility that I have, not only to my own students, but also to other students and to colleagues. I realize now that my responsibility as a literacy/numeracy instructor encompasses more than just my students acquiring skills to move forward in their lives. I learned that by posing questions and doing research, the benefits of my research can extend to other students and practitioners.

At first I was frustrated at what I, in my ignorance, initially viewed as a conference without a plan. I was also frustrated because I couldn't seem to find my place. However, once I let go of my preconceived notions from attending traditional scientific conferences, I accepted that my role was the same as all participants. I then began to notice that we were nurturing ideas in many directions to see what came out of them at the end. It was exhilarating, liberating, utterly exhausting and fun. I have never heard such sheer volume of words expressed in such a short amount of time. I was also impressed that there were so many different forums where we were encouraged to express our ideas - from the concurrent courses, to workshops, to inquiry sessions, to affinity groups, to the Institute evaluation.

A summer Institute sounds like it would be breezy and easy - this was anything but. I felt like I was inside a pressure cooking think tank, and wow

what an experience. I met many colleagues from across the country, learned about the similarities and differences we have between regions, and the difficulties we all face. I came away with a smile on my face and a

lot to think about and work on. Thanks for all the inspiration!

Karen Burns is a literacy/numeracy instructor at Malaspina University-College in Duncan, BC.

Research Funding

Sarah Lucas, Literacy BC Fund Development Coordinator



Where can you go to get research funding? The following sources have some flexibility around who does the research and how it is conducted.

- **The Vancouver Foundation** offers Education Grants that are designed to enhance the quality and accessibility of lifelong educational opportunities for all learners in British Columbia. The three annual deadlines for receiving completed grant application forms are the first Friday in January, April and September. (Allow at least 4 months for the entire process.) More details at www.vancouverfoundation.com
- **The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)** supports university-based research and graduate training in the social sciences and humanities. Of particular note are the relatively new Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) grants for community groups doing research with an institution as a partner. The deadline for a letter of intent is December 8, 2003. Formal applications are by invitation only and their deadline is

August 4, 2004. More details at www.sshrc.ca.

- **The Elva Knight Research Grant** provides up to US \$10,000 for research in reading and literacy. Each year, it is expected that at least one grant will be awarded to a teacher-initiated research project. The studies may be carried out using any research method or approach so long as the focus of the project is on research in reading/writing or literacy. Eligible applicants must be members of the International Reading Association (Individual Membership costs US\$36). Deadline for submission: January 15, 2004. More information and an application form are at www.reading.org/awards/grantkni.html

A good source of information on research grant is the **UBC ORS database of research granting agencies**, at <http://137.82.218.101/owa/progquery.query>

For more information on literacy funding, visit the **Funding Digest** on The Hub, Literacy BC's electronic conferencing system.





Reflections from Newfoundland

Marina Niks and Anneke van Enk

During the 2003 Research in Practice Institute in Newfoundland, we facilitated an inquiry group about the role academically trained researchers can and do play in the development of research in practice. The discussion was far-ranging but always spoke to the values and struggles that come into play when we try to decide what kinds of knowledge “count.”

Research tends to be popularly associated with practices developed in and carried out by academic institutions, and much of the existing theory about research, including various forms of research in practice, is published by university-based academics. “On the ground” too, initiatives to promote research in practice are frequently started up by or, at least, involve the participation of academically trained people. Whether based in a university or not, these researchers bring with them ways of thinking about and of doing research that are valued by the academic community. How does this, in turn, shape a form of research that is supposed to emerge from, and be oriented to the practitioner community?

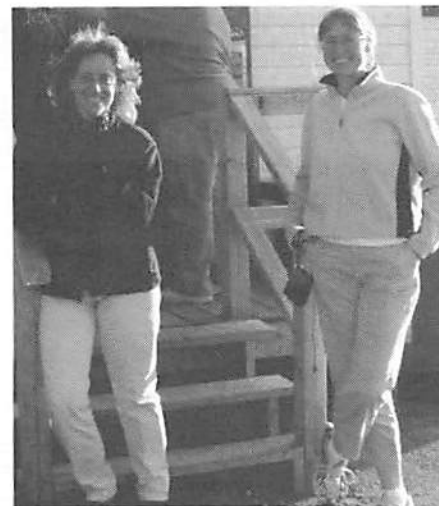
Our own participation in research in practice has allowed us to reflect more critically on the particular research community we are being trained to as doctoral students. We note that, while there is overlap between the two communities, there are important differences, too. For example, academically trained researchers are part of a community that dedicates large amounts of time and money to research; in the practitioner community time and

money tend to be allocated mainly to teaching and administration. Such material conditions shape research processes and products. Other differences may exist, as well, in terms of the kinds of questions that are of interest, the audiences being sought out, the ways in which research participants (i.e. “subjects”) are approached, the styles of documenting work, and the venues for its dissemination.

The Institute offered us an excellent opportunity to hear from others about the ways these differences play out in research in practice and to reflect together on what such differences might suggest about the role of academically trained researchers in research in practice. The lively and interesting discussion touched on: the importance of researcher reflexivity; the persistently common perception (both outside and within the university) that there is one “right” way to do research; the decision by one group of practitioner-researchers not to do a literature review and how this highlights the challenges posed to traditional research forms; and funding criteria in Canada.

There were many more threads pursued but, as the session drew to a

There were many more threads pursued but, as the session drew to a close, we were reminded that underpinning concrete examples and practical considerations is a philosophical and political debate about the foundations of knowledge.



Marina (left) and Anneke (right) standing at the steps of the church hall in Portugal Cove where Institute participants enjoyed “A Newfoundland and Labrador Evening.”

close, we were reminded that underpinning concrete examples and practical considerations is a philosophical and political debate about the foundations of knowledge. This debate, one university-based researcher noted, is alive in the academy too, and it suggested to her one role for academically trained researchers involved in research in practice: to link the concerns around knowledge creation that fuel research in practice to the debate within academia and, in the process, to advocate for the legitimacy of practitioner knowledge.

Marina Niks is a research friend for the BC adult literacy field and a doctoral candidate at the University of British Columbia. Anneke van Enk is a doctoral candidate at Simon Fraser University. Marina and Anneke are active participants in RiPAL-BC.

New Canadian Journal Connects Literacy Research and Practice

Sandy Middleton



For the past two years I have had the opportunity to participate on the Steering and Editorial Committees of a new

Canadian journal: *Literacies: Researching practice, practising research*. It has been tremendously rewarding to help launch this exciting and important new publication.

Long-time literacy workers Tracy Westell and Jenny Horsman believed that we were ready in Canada for a journal that would connect practice and research. Beginning in 2000 they led a three year process of consultation and planning across the country. The result is *Literacies*.

Tannis Atkinson, Managing Editor, and Tracey Mollins, Coordinator of Promotion and New Media, have done a superb job in spearheading the publication of the first two issues in May and November 2003.

Literacies is intended to nourish links between theoretical work and literacy practice and to support literacy work in many different forms. Tracy

Defoe, a workforce literacy educator in Vancouver, and a member of the Steering Committee, sees *Literacies* as a national forum that will help develop shared understanding within the literacy field: "We have to do everything we can to become a field in dialogue, and to find ways to build respect for what all of us – practitioners, learners, and academics – bring to the experience of teaching and learning," says Tracy. Anneke van Enk of Vancouver, a member of the Steering and Editorial Committees, describes the journal as "A vehicle for bringing together knowledge from many different places in the literacy field."

The print journal is published twice a year, in the spring and fall, and an online version is found at www.literacyjournal.ca. The journal includes a range of writing: analysis, reflection and opinion pieces, book reviews and creative works. People in the literacy field are invited to submit writing to the journal and can also participate in *Literacies* by helping

others write, giving feedback to writers, taking part in online forums about issues raised in the journal, and participating on the Steering and Editorial Committees.

Literacy BC is pleased to partner with the journal by including a complimentary copy of *Literacies* with this newsletter. Annual subscriptions are available for \$20.

The journal is sponsored by the Movement for Canadian Literacy and funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada.

journal@literacy.ca
www.literacyjournal.ca

The journal is a vehicle for bringing together knowledge from many different places in the literacy field.

Literacies

researching practice ♦ practising research

Building a Proactive and Collaborative Research and Development Model:

Real World Research in the National Youth Literacy Demonstration Project

Heide Spruck Wrigley



Literacy research can be lonely work. I have been a researcher and evaluator on numerous large-scale studies and program evaluations for over 15

years. The work has been exciting, challenging and often quite frustrating. By definition, outside researchers do not get to be part of the programs they investigate. They are expected to stay aloof from practice, to ask pre-

As a former teacher, I wanted to sit down with other teachers to explore ideas about classroom teaching and learner engagement... However, the strong emphasis on quantitative data in most large-scale studies makes it difficult to get at the deeper story of why things work or do not work.

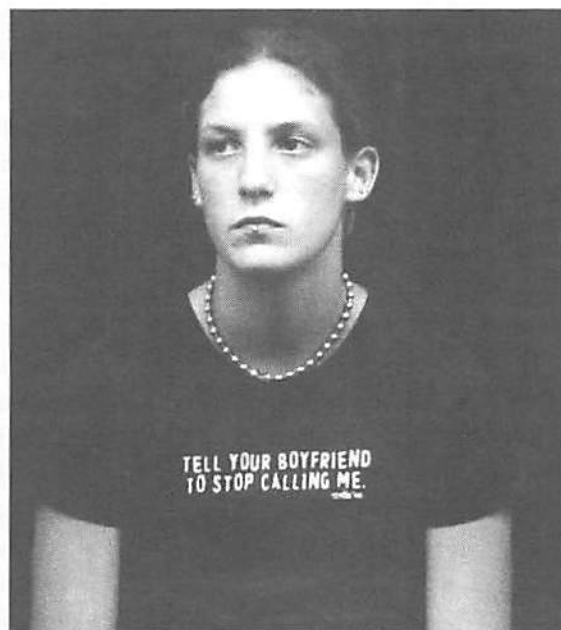
specified questions, collect information, analyze test scores, and then write up results in formats specified by the funding source. Typically, outside researchers do not give opinions or offer advice, since such involvement could result in a lack of objectivity. It could also pollute the data because some programs might make changes based on the researchers' input. Practitioner input into research is generally not welcome or sought only in the initial phases, most often as part of an advisory panel.

It is not surprising then that, for many literacy programs, the news that they

have been selected for a national research study, while flattering, is not entirely welcome. Programs are expected to cooperate fully by providing data about their students and answering researcher questions and by offering researchers access to their classrooms and to their students. Programs often don't hear about the results of a study that they have been part of until much later when data collection and analysis are completed, a process that might take years. When the results are finally published, often the reports do not speak to practitioners. Methods and findings tend to be discussed in dense academic prose; statistical information is written by and for other researchers and thus is not accessible to most lay people. Implications for practice may be entirely missing or not grounded in the realities of the everyday work of literacy practitioners.

When I have been involved in this kind of study in North America and abroad in Egypt and Poland, there has always been an underlying sense of frustration. As a former teacher, I wanted to sit down with other teachers to explore ideas about classroom teaching and learner engagement. I wanted to spend much more time finding out what really was happening in a program and why, and I wanted to work with

teachers to try out new ideas. However, the strong emphasis on quantitative data in most large-scale studies makes it difficult to get at the deeper story of why things work or do not work. Most frustrating perhaps has been the realization that



Student at The New School

in the literacy field we are researching and evaluating programs that operate on shoe-string budgets that limit what can be done and thus offer little evidence about what might be possible with additional resources.

Although I enjoyed building conceptual models for capturing literacy teaching, creating observation forms, and designing alternative assessments, I knew I wanted to be

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Research and Development Model (Cont'd)

involved in more hands-on models of research. I wanted more collaboration between researchers and practitioners, where we could work together to both build a program and document what happens. I recognized the value of the more traditional research I was involved in, but I also thought a more interactive, reciprocal research and development model that combines evidence from previous research studies with the professional wisdom of those doing literacy work in the

Building a Collaborative Research and Development Model

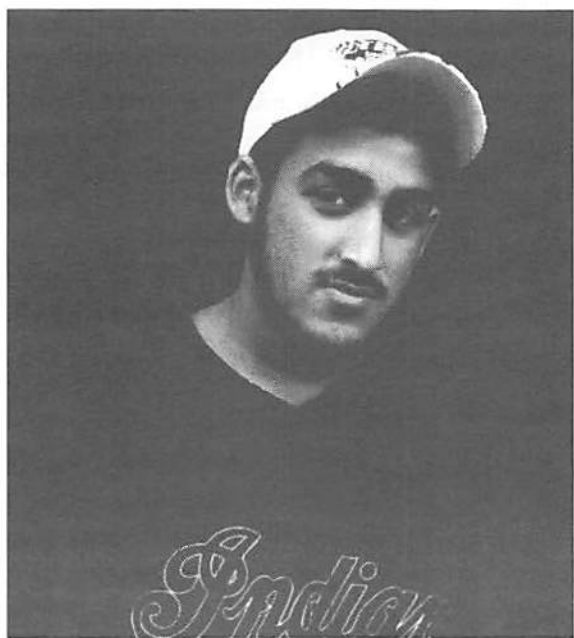
After completing a six-year national literacy study in the U.S., it was time for a change. I quit my job as a senior researcher with an international firm and formed a new partnership with Jim Powrie, who had done research and development work with youth programs and employment preparation for the hard-to-serve. Literacy issues were significant concerns for clients in these

programs. Jim and I had previously collaborated on the creation of product design standards for multimedia materials for adult literacy learners. As a team we were invited to work with literacy programs serving diverse populations in Chicago and in El Paso, Texas, a city directly on the U.S.-Mexico border.

We collaborated with teachers and program staff to design a service delivery model that integrated multimedia with both literacy development and opportunities for community engagement. From the

beginning, our research team was significantly involved in the design of the approach to instruction. We created sample curriculum materials for teachers to try out, provided in-service training for teachers, and met on a regular basis to discuss what worked and what didn't for various groups of students. We worked with teachers to revise materials and try out different approaches to instruction. Throughout the process, we documented student interactions and outcomes.

Both projects had a staff person from the student communities who acted as a liaison with our research team and who facilitated ongoing discussion and group meetings with the teachers. We all wanted to make sure we could exchange ideas with other practitioners while the project was still underway. To that end, we created web sites to collect ideas, share tips and hints for teachers, and showcase the work that teachers and students were doing (www.clese.org and www.bordercivics.org). In El Paso, we also worked with the program to create a local showcase where students could present their projects



Student at The New School

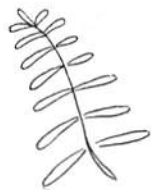
field had a critical role to play. (Scientific research combined with professional wisdom is the definition of "evidence-based research" put forth by the research branch of the U.S. Department of Education.) I was ready to conduct evidence-based research of the best kind, research that is grounded in the realities of everyday teaching and whose design reflects what we know about language, literacy, and learning, as well as what we learn during the course of the research.

I was ready to conduct evidence-based research of the best kind, research that is grounded in the realities of everyday teaching and whose design reflects what we know about language, literacy, and learning, as well as what we learn during the course of the research.

at a city-wide conference and where promising practices were then shared with teachers from other districts and other towns. In identifying promising practices we relied largely on qualitative research, using a modified case study approach where information was gathered through observations, interviews, and ongoing feedback. In both cases, the projects already collected data on learner outcomes through the use of a standardized test, and in both cases students showed significant gains in their language and literacy skills.

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Research and Development Model (Cont'd)



After nearly three years of working with this unique integrated and collaborative research and development model, we were asked to participate in the National Youth Literacy Demonstration Project conducted by Literacy BC and School District #36 – known as The New School @ Surrey. Now in our second year of the project, we are working with program and administrative staff to implement, study, and document a demonstration literacy program for disengaged youth who struggle with reading and either have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of school. Our task is not only to identify promising practices, but to document the challenges that students face in trying to improve their skills and reconnect with school and learning. Since the New School is a national demonstration project, research expectations are higher than if we worked with a single program. Given the various audiences for the results of the project, neither a purely quantitative, nor a largely qualitative research design would work. And an experimental design with a control

Through the mixed method design, we want to demonstrate what it takes to implement a sound intervention for struggling readers who face multiple turbulence factors in their lives. But we also need to measure what happens to kids as they engage in literacy and academic learning and learn to become more socially responsible and emotionally mature.

data but would make it difficult to show learner gains over time. In the end, we opted for a flexible design that used mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) and a research model that has been termed “realistic research” or “real world research” (Robson, 2002).

Through the mixed method design, we want to demonstrate what it takes to implement a sound intervention for struggling readers who face multiple turbulence factors in their lives. But we also need to measure what happens to kids as they engage in literacy and academic learning and learn to become more socially responsible and emotionally mature. Since we know that literacy learning is strongly influenced by social factors, we also want to find out more about the lives of our students outside of the classroom.

New School Research Methods and Measures

What then are some of the methods and measures we use in the New School research? Basic attendance and persistence data will show us what participation patterns are and to what extent the school has been successful in retaining students with very low attendance rates in the past. Scores from a standardized reading test will show learner gains on sub skills of reading, including vocabulary

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group was out of the question, both in terms of cost-effectiveness and feasibility since our model was still emerging. We needed to be pragmatic in our approach and had to find a middle ground between empirical research that used random assignments and relied largely on testing, and a purely qualitative design in the ethnographic tradition which would yield rich



Student at The New School

Research and Development Model (Cont'd)

knowledge, decoding skills, and comprehension skills, so that we have a better sense of where individual students are strong and where they are stuck. (Last year we had a couple of students who still struggled to make sense of print and were lacking even basic word attack skills). Yet this test will not tell us what strategies students try to use to gain meaning from print, how they feel about reading, what topics or books might resonate with them, or how they use literacy in their daily lives. To discover these things we need to observe them to see what learning opportunities engage them, expose them to a wide range of reading materials, and pay attention to how they respond.

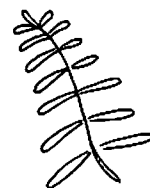
We try to capture what students say and do in the form of video footage and observation notes, and then use standard qualitative procedures to look for patterns and themes. But we are also creating and field testing a number of matrices containing indicators and rubrics to see where individual kids fall on a continuum of both literacy acquisition and social and emotional development. We expect to be able to get a good sense of not only what the strengths of individual students are but also how they differ from others in the group, both in terms of base-line data (where they started) and the progress they are (or are not) making. Knowing that literacy development is not a linear process, but develops in fits and spurts, we want to capture how students move back and forth in being able to handle different kinds of literacy tasks and what we do (or could do) to help them get better.

We are using a mixed design in trying to capture the family circumstances of our students as well. On the qualitative side, we use interviews and

ongoing dialogue with parents to capture some of the challenges the families face and give us insights into why our students may find it difficult to concentrate and engage learning. We also want to be able to identify some of the turbulence factors and crises in families' lives so that we can help them connect to the appropriate support services. To that end, we are field-testing a framework used by social service agencies in California and are adapting it to the circumstances of the families in the New School.

Although much of the research relies on systematic investigation into various aspects of the program, we pay a great deal of attention to anecdotal evidence – comments or incidents that capture what's going on with students. When one student who had a history of violent behaviours tells us, "I thought I should punch him for what he said to me, but I just didn't have it in me anymore," we know the program is succeeding in addressing violence issues, at least with this one student. When another writes in her log, "This ('Island of the Blue Dolphin') is the first book that I read and understood," we know that literacy is happening.

Through this work, all of us at The New School – researchers, teachers and the counsellor – share an appreciation for what we are trying to do, not only in terms of research but also to provide a second chance program for kids who have fallen through the cracks. We are all committed to making a difference in the lives of kids who struggle with literacy and whose lives are full of turbulence. We are also committed to conducting credible research and producing practical information that can make a difference. We hope that



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combining different research strands into a single holistic model of investigation will help us tell an honest story, a story that can guide both policy and practice. No wonder I love my job.

The New School @ Surrey is sponsored by Literacy BC and funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada; The National Crime Prevention Centre (Department of Justice); the Vancouver Foundation; and School District #36 (Surrey).

Heide Wrigley is the senior researcher at The New School @ Surrey.

Visit www.literacy.bc.ca for reports on the progress of The New School demonstration project.

Reference:

Robson, Colin (2002). *Real World Research*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.

Audrey's Light

Sandy Middleton



In June 2003 Audrey Thomas retired from the BC Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED) where she had held the position of Education Officer since 1994. That role was the most recent chapter in Audrey's long history of contributions to the literacy field. Audrey Thomas has shone a light on adult literacy for almost 30 years. That light burns brightly in the areas of teaching, curricula, training, policy analysis, organizational development, and research.

In this newsletter we mark Audrey's retirement by celebrating the light she has shed on literacy through her work as a researcher and an advocate for research in practice.

Audrey is an historian – one who has lived the history she writes about. The breadth and depth of her organizational affiliations and contributions to the emergence and development of national, provincial, and community-based literacy organizations are astounding. They include founding director and honorary life member of the Movement for Canadian Literacy and governor, chair, and lifetime companion of Frontier College. As a writer, she has reflected extensively on the achievements and challenges of a young field coming into its own during the past quarter century. From a seminal publication on adult literacy in Canada in 1976¹ to a recent chapter on how adult literacy became of age in Canada², her writings serve as an important "memory" of the history and development of adult literacy education in this country.

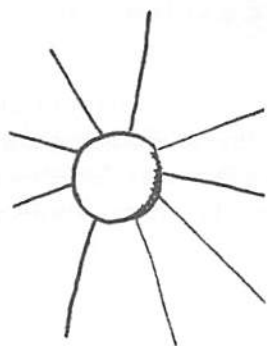
Audrey is an innovator. She was the first researcher in Canada to

investigate nonparticipation in literacy education, a critical issue previously neglected in the literature. It is estimated that less than ten percent of eligible adults ever attend a literacy program to improve their skills. In her groundbreaking 1990 study, *The Reluctant Learner: A research report on the reasons for nonparticipation and dropout in literacy programs in British Columbia*,³ Audrey sought out and interviewed "hard-to-reach" adults with low literacy skills who had never participated in a program, improving our understanding of the reasons for nonparticipation and raising the level of sophistication of adult literacy research in Canada.

Audrey is a leader. As an advocate for research she played a pivotal role in nurturing a research culture within the literacy field, at the national and provincial levels. In her position as Education Officer at AVED she introduced and supported several innovative initiatives which create and sustain opportunities for practitioners in literacy and adult basic education to do research. Working collaboratively with practitioners in the field and researchers in the academy, she set new directions that encourage and support research in practice. As a result of her leadership, the BC literacy field has benefited from a unique partnership with the academy through the role of "research friends" who provide support and training to practitioners in designing, undertaking and reporting on research projects. The rich outcomes of her efforts are seen in the number and quality of research in practice projects taking place in the BC literacy field and providing new and important insights into literacy

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Audrey's Light (Cont'd)

education in programs across the province.

Audrey is a pioneer. Throughout her long and brilliant career she has contributed to the transformation of adult literacy in Canada. Not too long ago, literacy was marginalized, there was a dearth of literacy research in Canada, and the field relied on research from the United Kingdom and the United States. Today, adult literacy is recognized as a vitally important social issue and literacy research in Canada is flourishing. Among those who have contributed to the growth and development of the literacy field and the advancement of literacy within Canadian society, Audrey Thomas, educator and researcher, stands tall.

References:

¹Thomas, Audrey (1976). *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Activities in Canada, 1975-76*. Toronto: World Literacy of Canada.

²Thomas, Audrey (2000). "How Adult Literacy Became of Age in Canada," in Maurice C. Taylor (ed.) *Adult Literacy NOW!* Toronto: Culture Concepts Inc./Irwin Publishing.

³Thomas, Audrey (1990). *The Reluctant Learner: A research report on the reasons for nonparticipation and dropout in literacy programs in British Columbia*. Victoria: Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, and the National Literacy Secretariat.

Audrey looks back, and ahead

In September 2003 I interviewed Audrey Thomas for this newsletter. In the interview Audrey reflects on research in practice, her work as a researcher, and how she sees the literacy field. She also shares with us some information about her life after retirement and her plans for the future.

Sandy Middleton



Why were you such a big supporter of research in practice in your position at the Ministry?

I learned from my government experience in Saskatchewan that you could be quite proactive in government – it isn't just a desk job, you can innovate. The literacy portfolio in the BC government afforded quite a bit of flexibility because it's grant-based. I was always looking for ways where I could lead the field. My appointment to the Ministry coincided with a series of national policy conversations, one of which was on research. I thought: I'm in a position to support practitioner research. I was a researcher myself. I understand the importance of research.

Why do you think it's important for practitioners to do research?

For me it's all rolled up with good practice, as well as trying to build capacity in the field. Evaluation, for example, is an essential part of program planning and a form of applied research, in the sense that it can generate more questions which can lead to a more research-based focus. If there's something evaluation shows is not right with your program or could be improved, you can do a little study around that. Your program will benefit and your

learners will have a richer experience. Literacy practitioners know the learners best and they are in an ideal position to reflect and raise issues for discussion and reflection.

One reason people may be more interested in research today is that they've figured out to a large extent what works in their programs. There's depth in the field now. When you have found a workable model then you can start thinking about other aspects that may lead to research.

What do you see as the biggest barriers to practitioners doing research?

Lack of time and energy – the overload factor. That's why I initially encouraged people to think small and do little pieces just by themselves. You have to be ready and willing to do research. And I think the readiness and willingness have come through the training workshops Marina Niks has given as a "research friend."

Having done research myself, I know it's quite lonely and you have nobody to talk to if you're working on your own. That's why people have wanted to work with their colleagues so we've had these collaborative projects. The idea of collaborating with your peers can be quite attractive, particularly for practitioners

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Audrey looks back, and ahead (Cont'd)

who've not done research before.

Where are we now in terms of capacity for research in practice in the field?

It's taken time to grow and to train people and give them the confidence. Now, we're beginning to build a bit of a literature base, step by step. As well, we're getting a network of interested people who can help build a movement and push it in different ways.

You are a researcher. As you look back at the research you've done, what stands out for you?

I think early on I was cast as a chronicler or an historian of the movement. And that helps to give legitimacy to the field – you document where you've come from, how you've grown, and where you're going. I wrote two reports in the late 70's and early 80's that helped to generate momentum and rally folks

to the cause. At that time it seemed like people were hungry to know more – they knew there was a literacy issue but they didn't know much about it. Those two reports were landmarks.¹

The projects I enjoyed the most were *The Reluctant Learner*² and the social studies curriculum project on cities in BC. I always remember being thrilled when I was looking at the data for *The Reluctant Learner* and how it seemed to be coming together in a pattern and confirming what some of the researchers with far more money and resources in the States had found. The *Cities* project gave me a way to combine geography (my major in university) with literacy and learners and bring it all together into a useful material.³

You have worked in literacy for a long time. In one word, how would you describe the literacy field?

Committed.

Tell me more about that.

Most people I've met in the field have gone beyond the call of duty. It's a field mainly dominated by women, not well paid. Even in community colleges there are people who have been on contracts for years rather than having a permanent place within the college system. Yet people keep coming back and giving of themselves – volunteering on boards and committees and putting in more hours than they're paid for. I think that has to be acknowledged. If we hadn't had that, I don't think the field would be as strong today as it is. And I think people recognize that commitment in others and respect and honour it. I've seen the same commitment in the learners who have

Kate Nesbitt of Telkwa, BC is Literacy BC's learner representative on the External Review Committee of the BC Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Program. Kate, who has worked with Audrey for the past two years on that committee, made a quilt to mark Audrey's retirement. The quilt represents different facets of Audrey's life – her career in literacy, her home and family, and her love of travel. Kate presented the quilt to Audrey at a meeting of the External Review Committee in Vancouver in October 2003.



Audrey (left) and Kate (right) holding the quilt.

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Audrey looks back, and ahead (cont'd)

worked for the cause – they give what they can.

Literacy is an issue that gets people at the emotional or gut level and the commitment in the first instance is to the learners. I know that was my motivation when I started in the field, that's what fired me up – to say that they could learn and there needed to be more adult programs. And you think about the structure of society and how finances are distributed – people want to make a difference.

How are you enjoying retirement?

It was a strange summer. I looked at it as a period of transition. I think I was uncoiling. I could take a lot of time over breakfast and not have to rush for the bus. I spent time in my garden. I could sit down and read a book for a couple of hours. I hadn't had much time for leisure reading so that was a luxury.

What have you read recently?

A lot of Canadian literature, including *Life of Pi* (Yann Martel), *Our Lady of the Lost and Found* (Diane Schoemperlen), *The Last Crossing* (Guy Vanderhaeghe), and some others. I'm just amazed at the fertility of Canadian literature now and the number of good people and the variety of work. There's such choice.

What are your plans now?

I'd like to do more travel. I want to spend time with my four year old granddaughter before she starts

school next year. I like music and I used to dabble in paints, maybe these things will emerge again. My husband has encouraged me to take a boating course. I quite like the water, but I'm not sure where that's going to lead. I can't really see myself leaping in and out of boats!

Do you have plans to continue working in the field?

Part of the transition is trying to adjust to this new situation and I haven't really had time to plan anything. If something really interesting came up that fit my schedule and inclination, I'd probably take it on. It's open.

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¹Thomas, Audrey (1976). *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Activities in Canada, 1975-76*. Toronto: World Literacy of Canada; Thomas, Audrey (1983). *Adult Illiteracy in Canada: A Challenge*. Occasional paper No. 42. Ottawa: Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

²Thomas, Audrey (1990). *The Reluctant Learner: A research report on the reasons for nonparticipation and dropout in literacy programs in British Columbia*. Victoria: Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, and the National Literacy Secretariat.

³Thomas, Audrey (1992). *Cities of British Columbia*. Victoria: Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, and the National Literacy Secretariat.

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Directory of Canadian Research

The **Directory of Canadian Adult Literacy Research in English** is a comprehensive on-line database containing research from 1994, as well as research in progress. Search it at: www.nald.ca/crd/start.htm.

- Supporting Learners
- Providing Consultation, Referral, and Resources
- Raising Public Awareness
- Coordinating Regional Literacy Networks
- Providing Training and Professional Development
- Influencing Public Policy
- Building Partnerships

A Word to Our Readers

We plan to complement *Imprints*, our print newsletter, with a new service initiated this fall. In September 2003 our first e-bulletin was distributed to over 800 people on our mailing list. The e-bulletin is designed to bring you timely news and information about what's happening in the field. Future issues of *Imprints*, like this one, will focus in-depth on specific topics.

We want to hear from you! Tell us how you enjoyed this newsletter about research in practice and the September e-bulletin. If you did not receive the e-bulletin, contact us to put you on the distribution list.

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